

DRE Report to the Board
March 2019

Dear Board members,

I'm realizing more than ever what a transitional year this is for our RE program.

As you know, we've made some major shifts over the last few months, away from traditional lesson plans and towards a relationship-based model of classroom interaction. The term I've often used to describe our approach – play-based learning – doesn't do justice to the amount of learning that happens – or at least, *can* happen when it is intentionally fostered.

What I've noticed over the last few weeks is that our shift to play-based learning has so far not been accompanied by the kind of training and re-training for our RE volunteers that will be necessary for the model to really flourish – and work as it's supposed to.

Thus the RE Committee and I have been looking into resources and putting together a new orientation for our volunteers to go through. One of the components of this – which I'd like to see enshrined as a cornerstone of our program – is familiarity with the basics of Non-Violent Communication. Learning to speak without judgment, to speak the language of feelings and needs, and to truly respect each other and co-create a meaningful time together doesn't just happen on its own.

It's my hope that our new orientation will provide the re-training necessary for our volunteers to feel comfortable shifting away from traditional power dynamic of the classroom – with adults who know more and best and children who need to be taught something. What we want to intentionally create is a learning environment in which we are all treated as sovereign beings, that we don't just say that we respect each other, but that we actively do that by giving up our own control over the process.

These shifts won't feel perfect overnight. We are having continuing discussion (within the RE Committee and with parents and teachers) about the right balance for us between lessons and intentional play. We may have to experiment for a while before we hit on a mixture that feels just right for our group. But I know we will get there. I'm encouraged by the influx of families this year, who come and then come again and again. This tells me that we are definitely on the right path.

My best,

Bethany Vaccaro